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Implementation of integrated, coherent and coordinated support to South Sudan by the United Nations system

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. Following the independence of South Sudan on 9 July 2011, the Economic and Social Council, through its resolution 2011/43, expressed interest in working with partners in addressing the extensive humanitarian, peacebuilding and development challenges facing the country. The present report is the sixth on South Sudan submitted to the Council since the country's independence.

2. The first report (E/2012/76) outlined the support of the United Nations system for the Government of South Sudan and the building of local capacity after the country's independence. The second report (E/2013/73) described the support provided to development and peacebuilding frameworks. The third report (E/2014/94) depicted how the outbreak of conflict in December 2013 reversed much of the progress made since independence. The fourth report (E/2015/74) provided a focus on the continuing impact of the conflict. The fifth report (E/2016/71), which was submitted in May 2016, before the crisis that took place in Juba in July of that year, emphasized efforts to support the implementation of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (Peace Agreement), signed in August 2015, and support for recovery and a shift from emergency humanitarian aid towards longer-term development priorities.

3. The present report outlines the major developments that have occurred since the previous report to the Council. In the first half of 2016, there was hope of returning to the path of peace and development, with significant steps being taken towards implementation of the Peace Agreement. A Transitional Government of National Unity was formed and, in April 2016, the opposition leader, Riek Machar, returned to Juba and was sworn in as First Vice-President. However, in July 2016, a violent crisis erupted in Juba as a result of the hardening of mutual suspicion and lack of trust between the parties. After several days of heavy fighting, Mr. Machar left Juba along with a number of his supporters.

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4. This crisis was followed by continued instability and local fighting, a further severe deterioration of the humanitarian situation, erosion of social cohesion and deepening economic crisis. While the Peace Agreement remained recognized as the framework for the peace process, there was a further slowdown in the completion of the transitional milestones.

5. In December 2016, a national dialogue was launched by the Transitional Government of National Unity as a process for the people of South Sudan to clarify fundamental issues related to national unity and the structure of the State. At the same time, a technical committee was established to operationalize the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing within the framework of the Peace Agreement. In the first part of 2017, the humanitarian situation deteriorated even further, with a localized famine declared in February 2017 in some areas of the country.

II. Context

6. The Peace Agreement of August 2015 created new hopes for progress, but the crisis and the fighting in Juba in July 2016 revealed the underlying fragility of the peace process. While until June 2016, the international community focused on supporting the formal milestones of the peace process with the formation of the Transitional Government of National Unity, the Transitional National Legislative Assembly and the launch of transitional security arrangements, the situation changed dramatically after the crisis in July 2016.

7. The crisis gave rise to serious violence, including sexual violence, and many deaths in Juba, and led to the evacuation of aid workers and United Nations staff in the following months and to significant disruptions in their work. Furthermore, in the aftermath of the crisis, tensions have been heightened in many locations across the country, and fighting and unrest has spread to areas that were previously considered relatively stable, including the Equatorias in the southern part of the country and parts of Bahr el-Ghazal in the north-west. In addition, localized fighting has continued in the Greater Upper Nile region and Unity, as well as in Jonglei, where the conflict had mostly been concentrated until the crisis in July. Sexual and gender-based violence has been used as a weapon of war. From January to September 2016, more than one in five cases of gender-based violence reported to humanitarian partners involved sexual violence, mainly perpetrated by armed actors.

8. The establishment of 28 new states in late 2015, followed by the creation of four additional states in January 2017, led to an increase in the total number of states from the original 10 to 32. The new states are struggling to function owing to a lack of institutional capacities, infrastructure, funding and unresolved state boundary issues and to tensions and violence between communities in some states. The weakening and fragmentation of local governance and the overall lack of government funding sources contribute to the bureaucratic obstacles experienced by aid agencies.

9. While these developments represent overwhelming challenges for the population and for efforts to provide international aid, it should be noted that the national conflict between the government-led and the opposition factions did not resume after the July 2016 crisis in Juba, and the Peace Agreement remains in place as the formal basis for the political process. On 14 December 2016, the President, Salva Kiir, called for a national dialogue, appointed a steering committee and called for support from three independent think tanks based in Juba as a secretariat. The national dialogue is expected to include a wide range of issues related to peacebuilding and development and the future unity of the South Sudanese State

and nation. International actors, including the United Nations, have expressed readiness to support an inclusive and genuine dialogue process, in which women should also be given a central role. However, a timeline for the national dialogue has yet to be announced.

10. The humanitarian crisis in South Sudan has escalated dramatically during the reporting period. There are now an estimated 7.5 million people — more than one in two across the country — in need of humanitarian assistance, and the continued fighting since July 2016 has uprooted hundreds of thousands of civilians. An estimated 3.7 million people have now been displaced, and this displacement comprises nearly 28 per cent of the total population of South Sudan, including 1.9 million who are internally displaced and 1.8 million who have fled as refugees to neighbouring countries. Record numbers of people have fled to Uganda, with more than 180,000 people arriving since the beginning of 2017, bringing the total number of South Sudanese refugees in Uganda to more than 850,000 (58 per cent children; 56 per cent female). The refugee crisis in South Sudan is the fastest growing in the world.

11. Food insecurity and malnutrition have reached unprecedented levels, with localized famine declared in two counties in Unity in February. Insecurity and lack of access have caused a further 1 million people to be on the brink of famine. Country-wide, some 4.9 million people are now estimated to be severely food insecure, and this number is expected to rise to 5.5 million at the height of the lean season in July. Some 1 million children in South Sudan and some 340,000 pregnant and lactating women are now estimated to be acutely malnourished.

12. Civilians continue to be killed and subjected to horrendous violations, including sexual violence. In 2016, more than 2,600 cases of sexual and gender-based violence (up 62 per cent as compared with 2015) were reported to humanitarian partners, 95 per cent of which concerned women and girls, and 61 per cent of which concerned children. There are continued reports of the use of rape as a weapon of war, including recent reports of sexual violence in several locations in the Equatorias and in Unity.

13. The children of South Sudan face immense risks. Over 17,000 children are estimated to have been recruited by armed actors in South Sudan and over 9,000 children have been registered as unaccompanied, separated or missing. More than 1.1 million children aged 3 to 18 years have lost access to education owing to conflict and displacement and an estimated 1 million children are in psychosocial distress. Reports indicate that people are increasingly resorting to negative coping mechanisms, including child labour and child marriage. In Eastern Equatoria, child marriages are reported to have increased in late 2016, as families receive a bride price in exchange for their daughters.

14. Susceptibility to disease has risen after three years of conflict and crisis. Access to safe hygiene and clean water has been compromised owing to repeated displacement and damage to key infrastructure, and communicable diseases are spreading. South Sudan is currently experiencing the longest and most widespread cholera outbreak since its independence. The cholera outbreak that began in June 2016 has spread to more locations and lasted longer than outbreaks in 2014 and 2015. There are rising cases of deadly tropical diseases. Kala-azar and measles cases have been confirmed in four counties since the beginning of 2017. Violence and displacement in the Greater Equatoria region have severely affected populations with the highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS and disrupted access to life-saving treatment.

15. The deteriorating situation has been further compounded by many areas being contaminated by explosive items.

16. During the reporting period there were widespread human rights violations and abuses in South Sudan, and documented breaches of international humanitarian law. Despite the Peace Agreement, government and opposition forces have continued to fight in different locations across the country, and both have targeted civilians on the basis of ethnicity and suspected support for the other side. There have been spikes in violence in several locations since May 2016, including an outbreak of heavy fighting in Juba in July and ongoing clashes in other areas since then. Each spike in violence has been accompanied by reports of grave human rights violations. These included killings of civilians, cases of torture and other inhuman and degrading treatment, conflict-related sexual violence, arbitrary arrest and detention, looting and destruction of civilian property, widespread forced displacement of the civilian population and restrictions on freedom of expression, movement, association and assembly.

17. Following a deterioration in the human rights situation in July 2016, and a sharp increase in hate speech in October 2016, the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide visited South Sudan in November 2016 and warned that there was a risk of violence escalating along ethnic lines, with the potential for genocide. Later the same month, the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan reported that a steady process of ethnic cleansing was under way in several areas of South Sudan.

18. While government and opposition forces were both responsible for human rights violations and abuses, the majority of documented cases were committed by government forces and allied groups. The government side has taken little action to hold those responsible to account, and impunity for human rights violations and abuses remain a serious concern.

19. The economic outlook for South Sudan remains difficult owing to fiscal challenges associated with reduced oil revenues, the conflict and difficult choices regarding economic policies. The current challenges can be traced to the 2012 oil shutdown due to oil-related disagreements with Khartoum on transit fees, which were followed by the conflicts in 2013 and the crisis in 2016, and to volatility in global crude oil prices, particularly since 2014. The consequences on the economy and the people of South Sudan have largely been negative. The month of February 2017 became the fifteenth month in succession of triple-digit year-on-year inflation, estimated at more than 400 per cent. The budget deficit reached about 30 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2015/16, but has been reduced to about 9 per cent of GDP in the 2016/17 fiscal year budget. The situation has been compounded by long periods of fuel shortages, delays in salary payments and the difficulty for government of attracting external funding.

20. Economic and fiscal stabilization measures, several of which address the provisions of the Peace Agreement are slowly being implemented. These measures were announced in October 2016 and include increasing revenue (increase taxes, reduce tax exceptions, strengthen tax administration and increase oil revenues); reducing expenditure (payroll, discretionary and government contracts); cash management (cancel all outstanding cheques, cash management committee, arrears repayment plan); and strengthening monetary policy and the banking system (capital and reserve requirements, renegotiate loans and financial audit). Challenges remain with the consistency in the design and implementation of these as well as other economic policies.

III. Impact of the conflict on development

21. The lack of political progress, insecurity, the difficult economic outlook and the continued severe deterioration in the humanitarian situation has led to a shift in donor funding away from development towards humanitarian support. While the staff of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes had returned to Juba in the last part of 2016 after the evacuation following the crisis in July, many bilateral donors and international financial institutions remained absent or with significantly reduced staffing. Active planning and coordination of development activities with international actors largely ceased during this period. Despite the absence of renewed conflict at the national level, this situation has caused significant obstacles to development. The Peace Agreement requires the development of a strategic economic development road map (a national development plan of three to five years) to accelerate progress in achieving an inclusive, sustainable and resilient national economy. Owing to the overall delay and lack of momentum behind the Peace Agreement, this work has not yet begun, but is expected to resume in 2017 as part of the process around the national dialogue.

22. The delivery of humanitarian aid faces serious obstacles. More than 80 aid workers have been killed in South Sudan since the beginning of the civil war in December 2013 and there have been at least six attacks on humanitarian convoys in the first months of 2017. Humanitarian compounds and supplies continue to be looted and vandalized in multiple locations.

23. Humanitarian actors face repeated challenges to reach people in dire need as a result of clashes, insecurity and access denials. Life-saving activities have been disrupted owing to access constraints and insecurity, with more than 100 aid workers being relocated since the beginning of 2017 alone and several thousand since the beginning of the conflict.

24. Despite intensive negotiations, there continue to be many instances of access denial at checkpoints and other forms of interference and obstruction. In recent months, there have been cases of detention and deportation of senior non-governmental organization staff; extortion at checkpoints; efforts by authorities to unduly influence recruitment processes both in Juba and at the subnational level, including requesting that specific positions in non-governmental organizations be nationalized under the rules introduced by the Non-Governmental Organizations Act of 2016; increases in fees for the processing of key permits and documentation; and repeated requests by subnational authorities for fees that have already been paid to national authorities.

IV. United Nations support to South Sudan

25. Despite the challenges, the humanitarian operation in South Sudan continues to scale up its response in the face of mounting needs, especially in the famine-affected areas. The 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan — which includes United Nations agencies and international and national non-governmental organizations — calls for $1.6 billion to deliver humanitarian assistance and protection to some 5.8 million people throughout the course of the year. Given the rapid deterioration in the humanitarian situation, and the dramatic increase in the humanitarian caseload, the Plan is focused solely on emergency and life-saving relief and was designed to complement the parallel efforts by the United Nations to support resilience and localized development.

26. In 2016, humanitarians reached more than 5.1 million people across South Sudan with assistance. In the first months of 2017, aid workers were deployed in

multiple locations and had reached more than 1.3 million people with assistance and protection, including more than 330,000 people in counties affected by famine since February 2017. Organizations have delivered food, seeds and tools, vital nutritional supplies, health backpacks, cholera treatment supplies and critical non-food items in harsh and challenging terrain, including in areas where people have fled to islands in search of safety and protection. Across the famine-affected counties, humanitarian organizations are delivering vital and life-saving services and are undertaking coordinated multisectoral mobile missions into areas of greatest need. Beyond the famine, responses in other parts of the country continue.

27. The Interim Cooperation Framework was developed in 2015, after the Peace Agreement, and is designed to set short-term priorities for the United Nations country team to support recovery and resilience during the transitional period, while laying the ground for long-term development and the next United Nations Development Assistance Framework. In the development of the Interim Cooperation Framework, the United Nations country team consulted with government partners and with donors in November 2015 and launched the Interim Cooperation Framework jointly at an event in October 2016. The total budget for United Nations recovery and development support under the Interim Cooperation Framework for the two-year period of 2016 and 2017 is $877 million. The Interim Cooperation Framework has provided a useful tool for setting priorities and providing direction for the development work of the United Nations country team, but the crisis in July 2016 caused disruption to implementation owing to evacuations of agency staff and security issues. However, many activities returned to normal after the crisis, although donor funding for recovery and development has decreased significantly.

28. The implementation of the Peace Agreement slowed down and stalled during the year, and this affected a number of planned activities negatively, as the potential for political and institutional engagement weakened. The crisis also had a negative impact on security and access to many geographic areas for development activities. Furthermore, many planned activities that depended on strong cooperation with state governments were negatively impacted as state-level partners became increasingly unavailable owing to instability and the creation of new states. The shift of donor funding towards humanitarian activities influenced the ability of the United Nations to support capacity-building for service delivery.

29. On the positive side, work directly at community level was not affected as much, including, in particular, support for food security, community security and some livelihood-related activities with a focus on skills and asset development. Furthermore, some livelihood activities adapted their focus and were able to restart at the end of the year. Some policy support and capacity-building activities at the central and the local levels continued, despite the deterioration in the overall environment.

30. Initially, the duration of the Interim Cooperation Framework was expected to cover 2016 and 2017, but a decision has now been made to extend it for one more year, until 2018, to enable the priorities of a national development plan to be identified before moving on to a full United Nations Development Assistance Framework.

V. Prospects and recommendations

31. The suffering of the people of South Sudan, the displacement and refugee flows and the lives threatened by food insecurity and famine require a robust humanitarian response, and life-saving humanitarian assistance must be a first priority in the current situation. The Government and all other national actors in

South Sudan must cooperate fully with the international community, remove barriers and obstacles and ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance. However, a resolution to this extremely serious situation can be found only through durable peace and development reinforced by stabilization and recovery initiatives. Peace is a precondition for ending the humanitarian emergency, for achieving development goals and the aspirations of the people of the independent country of South Sudan. A first credible step towards peace must be a cessation of hostilities, followed by a process that addresses the root causes of the conflict, accountability for human rights violations and the establishment of a shared vision for the future of the country through dialogue and reconciliation.

32. The Transitional Government of National Unity and all national stakeholders and groups are responsible for enabling humanitarian delivery and access and for supporting and promoting dialogue and reconciliation. In this light, the initiative of President Salva Kiir to launch a national dialogue is welcome, and international actors and the United Nations are ready to offer their support for a genuine and inclusive process that includes all groups and parts of the nation of South Sudan, including those men and women marginalized by the conflict and those that have fled the country. No one should be left behind in rebuilding the country and laying out the course towards a stable, peaceful and prosperous future.

33. Dialogue and reconciliation should be a focus of the United Nations and international actors as an ongoing priority, and activities can be supported in different ways and in different parts of the country, depending on local conditions. Even in the absence of progress at the national level, local dialogues at the community level, supporting initiatives that strengthen community, cultural and economic interdependencies and different dialogue platforms can play an important role in strengthening social cohesion, addressing conflict drivers and creating an enabling environment for peace. The international community cannot afford to lose any opportunity to build the foundations of peace, and must ensure that this remains a central priori.

34. In the absence of a national framework for development and a nationally owned development plan, long-term initiatives for building capacities and systems for development and service delivery will be constrained. The United Nations country team will offer its support for preparing a national development plan aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and informed by the provisions of the national action plan for implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. Progress towards this will depend on the overall political context and the reengagement of international development actors.

35. However, much can still be done at the local level in many parts of the country to support resilience and to reinvigorate livelihoods and the local recovery of social services. Experience shows that local recovery and stabilization initiatives can strengthen resilience against shocks, including food insecurity, reduce the requirement for humanitarian aid and increase the likelihood of the success of dialogue initiatives, ensuring progress towards reconciliation, peace and development. In line with the outcomes of the World Humanitarian Summit, held in Istanbul, Turkey, in May 2016, and the new way of working in the United Nations, the need for balancing the humanitarian and development dimensions in the protracted country context of South Sudan needs to be further emphasized.

36. The United Nations country team in South Sudan is already engaged in promoting recovery and stabilization, building on an area-based, integrated programme in parts of the country where conditions allow this. A pilot programme is being rolled out in 2017 in the Northern Bahr el-Ghazal region, with a concrete road map to expand to the Equatoria, Unity and Jonglei regions. Expansion to other

regions will require the participation of national and local stakeholders as well as the international donor community. The initiative aims at building community resilience and preparing the ground for recovery, including through local initiatives such as: the provision of support for health, nutrition, protection, water and sanitation, education; training of farmers; supporting women's vegetable production and food and fish processing activities for enhanced nutrition; emergency employment for rehabilitating and rebuilding local markets and supporting small traders and small businesses; cash for work to build feeder roads; diversification of livelihood options, including through vocational skills training; and renewable energy solutions for public services. By augmenting resilience among local communities and local institutions in tandem, these steps will contribute to preventing and mitigating the food insecurity situation and the protracted humanitarian crisis in South Sudan and will help lay the ground for durable peace and development.